

1st Sunday in Lent

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

<sup>6</sup> We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

<sup>2</sup> (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)

<sup>3</sup> Giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed:

<sup>4</sup> But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

<sup>5</sup> In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labor's, in watching's, in fasting.

<sup>6</sup> By pureness, by knowledge, by long suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,

<sup>7</sup> By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

<sup>8</sup> By honor and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true.

<sup>9</sup> As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live as chastened and not killed.

<sup>10</sup> As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

<sup>4</sup> Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

<sup>2</sup> And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward hungered.

<sup>3</sup> And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

<sup>4</sup> But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God.

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

<sup>6</sup> And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.

<sup>9</sup> And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

<sup>10</sup> Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil leaves him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

### **Introduction**

Many years ago, when I had small children, my wife announced she was going to take them to Portland to see their cousins. We had not spent much time apart, but it seemed like a prudent idea to stay home, watch the dogs and not have to miss work. It also seemed to me, at the time, like a wonderful respite from the daily tasks of fatherhood. I would have a weekend of freedom to do what I liked in whatever time frame I decided on. I was excited at the prospect. I went to work on Friday and almost immediately I began have choices to make. A female probation officer, who I knew was recently divorced, saw me in the break room and asked me if I wanted to grab a beer after work with her and some of the other people from the office. At first, I thought, sure why not, but after reflecting on it I decided that it probably was not a wise choice. I ended up not going but I was tempted. Later, another coworker asked about my plans for the weekend, and I replied that I was alone and free. He suggested we go up to the Cow Creek casino, have a few drinks and gamble. Once again it sounded like an entertaining outing, but in thinking about it, I really did not have much in the way of expendable income. It is amazing how a trip to the casino can turn expensive really quickly. I ended up declining the invitation, but I was tempted to just throw caution to the wind and go. All weekend long I faced temptation to make choices that I normally would not make. Unhealthy food, the choices of the internet, and television that was negative and promised to fill my brain with images that I did not need or want

was all there. I was alone and free, I could do what I wanted, really feed the flesh if I so desired. I ended up staying at home and getting caught up on some projects around the house I had been putting off. Cleaning the garage, making a dump run and reading ended up filling the time. I realized that sometimes the thought of freedom is just an excuse or justification to make bad choices or reward us with things that do not move us closer to God. Temptation is constant as the enemy wants us to do things that dishonor God and usually result in only immediate gratification. In 1 Peter 5:8 we are reminded to *“be sober, be watchful, Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith.”* Our minds trick us through justification, rationalization and minimization until it is too late, and we have made choices we regret. I was happy to see the car pull up and my family home with me.

### **Body**

**(Matthew 4:1-11) Our Gospel tells us of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, where after 40 days of fasting, Satan tempts him three times, but Jesus resists each temptation by quoting scripture, causing the devil to leave him and angels to come and minister to him.**

In our Gospel reading for today, in Matthew, we hear how after fasting for 40 days and nights, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Knowing how hungry Jesus was, the first temptation from Satan was to challenge Him to turn stones into bread.

*“If you are the son of God, turn these stones into loaves of bread” (Matt. 4:3)*

Jesus replies to Satan, *“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”* (v. 4) He rebukes Satan and the comforts of food and focuses on the Word of God for nourishment. The devil then takes Jesus *“up into the holy city,*

*and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, He will give his angels charge of you and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” (v. 5-6). Jesus again rebukes the devil by saying “Again it is written, you shall not tempt the Lord your God” (v.7) The final attempt to entice Jesus came as the devil took him to a high mountain where he could see all the glorious kingdoms of the world. He then tells Jesus, “All these I will give to you, if you will fall down and worship me” (v.9) Once again Jesus sternly rebuke’s Satan and says “Begone Satan! For it is written you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve” (v.10)*

This passage of Scripture demonstrates the power of God’s Word in resisting the devil and his schemes, serving as a model for how Christians should resist temptation in their own lives. The closer we are to God, by immersing ourselves in His Word, the stronger we will be when faced with temptation to sin. We can be spiritually strong while being physically weak, being content with “*weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities*” (2 Corinthians 12:10). Jesus had God’s Word in His heart and mind when confronted by Satan and He answered with Scripture for every temptation Satan used. We can also rely on the power of God’s word to keep us moving toward Him and not letting the temptations of sin get a hold of us.

By reading the Bible we can glean many important lessons that we can apply to our own lives. The Word of God gives us examples of how people have fallen into temptation and how they can teach us to persevere.

The first Biblical introduction to temptation occurs in Genesis where the story of Adam and Eve embodies the universal struggle with temptation, presenting an account that resonates through the ages. Their fateful encounter with the forbidden fruit serves as a vivid metaphor for human curiosity and desire in its rawest form. By going against what was commanded by God,

they chose to chase after knowledge rather than trust divine provision. They were tempted to question God, and by giving in to that temptation, by choosing to trust in their own actions, they lost trust in Him. Their story invites all of us to reflect on how often we too prioritize momentary gratification over deeper truths, or temporary indulgences over the treasures of heaven. The story of Adam and Eve teaches the importance of obedience to God's commands and the dangers of rationalizing sin.

Another example the Bible gives us is in Genesis with the story of Cain. Cain, the archetype of jealousy and anger in the biblical narrative, vividly illustrates how unchecked emotions can spiral into tragic consequences. Cain's anger and jealousy was stirred by his perception of God's favor towards Abel. This ignited a smoldering rage inside him that consumed him, transforming him from a farmer into the world's first murderer. Cain serves as a poignant reminder that unresolved feelings, be they jealousy or anger, can lay the groundwork for devastating choices. This is often the case with us in our daily lives. How often do we let anger or resentment cloud our judgements and allow us to be tempted into making bad decisions or hurting others?

Another example of temptation occurs in the second book of Samuel. (2 Sam. 11-12) Here we read the story of David and Bathsheba, which outlines the dangers of lust and unchecked desire. David sees Bathsheba bathing and is overcome with desire and lust for her. He ends up sending for her and committing adultery. David's story is a profound exploration of the human condition, illustrating how even the most revered figures in history can succumb to temptation, especially in this instance. This moment serves as a stark reminder that temptation often strikes when we least expect it, and we are often most vulnerable when we feel like we are in control. What makes David's narrative particularly compelling is the aftermath of his actions.

Knowing Bathsheba was married to Uriah, he maneuvers to have him killed in battle so he can cover up his sinful actions. The ripple effects of his seduction led to a cascade of tragedy, including betrayal and murder, revealing how one lapse in judgment can multiply into other sinful actions that often have irrevocable consequences. Working as a parole officer, I saw many, many examples of how acting on these types of temptations ruined lives, destroyed families, and created even more sinful choices.

Consider another example in the book of Judges. (c.13-16) Samson shows us the dangers of pride and arrogancy and how they can cloud our judgement and allow us to be manipulated or tempted by the enemy. Samson's story is a sobering reminder of how pride can lead to vulnerability. His pride in his own strength and his disregard for God's commandments made him susceptible to sin. The story of Samson teaches that we must be cautious not to let pride blind us to the dangers of temptation. God had gifted Samson with strength and influence, but his downfall came when he forgot that his strength came from God, not himself.

When we read about Judas Iscariot in the Gospels, we learn of the dangers of greed and how that can result in sin. His decision to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver was not merely about financial gain; it symbolized a character fault where loyalty and obedience was eclipsed by the allure of wealth and status. In Judas's choices, we uncover a profound warning about misplaced priorities. Greed often cultivates a disconnection from our values, nurturing mistrust even within close relationships. Wealth and status are powerful temptations. How often do we see people forsaking others to gain financial wealth, often destroying families and relationships. It is common to see people tempted to add to their fortunes and see these idols replace God in their lives. The Apostle Paul warns us in his letter to Timothy, *"Those who desire to be rich fall*

*into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction” (1 Tim. 6:9).*

Each of these biblical characters fell into temptation in diverse ways, through pride, jealousy, lust, greed, or fear, and their stories all point to the importance of relying on God for strength to resist temptation. Whether it is the original sin of Adam and Eve or the betrayal of Judas, the Bible reminds us that giving in to temptation can lead to devastating consequences, but God’s mercy is always available for those who repent and are “heartily sorry for these our misdoings.” Just as Jesus rebukes Satan, we can be assured that God is there to help us fight these battles of temptation and help us to live our life according to His will. It is important to be mindful of our vulnerabilities and the importance of staying grounded in faith and seeking God’s help to overcome the temptations we face in our lives. With every misstep, with every sin, comes an opportunity for repentance, growth and insight; understanding that our bad choices do not define us but through them God can mold us into something greater if we seek forgiveness and wisdom moving forward.

### **Action**

As we enter into Lent, let us look at how we are tempted into sin. If we are mindful, we can use this season of Lent to look inward and see the areas of our lives that lead us into temptation. Resisting temptation and things that move us away from God, is a tangible expression of loyalty and obedience to God’s commands. It signifies a personal choice to prioritize God’s will over our own selfish desires. Temptation often leads to sin which can have worldly and eternal consequences for our lives. Overcoming temptation strengthens one's character, fosters self-discipline, increases perseverance and moral fortitude. It prepares individuals for future challenges and strengthens their ability to resist further temptations. In our

Gospel reading, Jesus Christ himself faced and overcame temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). His example serves as a model for believers, demonstrating that resisting temptation is possible through reliance on God's Word and His power over evil. Probably more importantly, by choosing to resist temptation and live according to God's will, believers bring glory to God and demonstrate the transformative power of faith. Resisting temptation is not just about avoiding sin; it is also about actively pursuing spiritual growth. During this Lenten season, let us maintain a conscious effort to minimize temptation that leads to sin, learn to rely on God's grace, and make a personal commitment to living a life that honors God.

### **Conclusion**

Matthew 4:1-11 describes the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, where Satan tempts him to rebel against the Father. Jesus resists each temptation by quoting scripture, ultimately causing the devil to leave him and angels to come and minister to him. Our Gospel reading demonstrates Jesus' complete reliance on the power of God's word in resisting the devil and his schemes and serves as a model for how Christians can look at temptation and how to resist it. We are not alone in this fight, as we can find strength in prayer, in trusting God, and by knowing that we can be forgiven of our sins. Through study of the Word, we are reminded of our vulnerabilities and the importance of staying grounded in faith. It is important that we seek God's help to overcome the temptations we face in our lives.

**To the only wise God our Savior, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, both now  
and forever. Amen.**